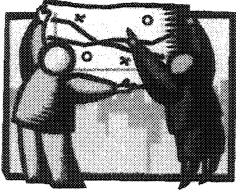


Chapter 6: School Meals



This chapter provides suggestions and examples for planning actions involving the school meal program.

Module 1: Creating School Meal Program Awareness.....321

Creating awareness of the role and value of the school meal program

Module 2: Environmental Changes with School Meals.....334

Using the community review to identify school meal opportunities for healthy eating and physical activity choices

Module 3: School Meal Program in Action.....344

School Meal actions including Team Nutrition and Nutrition Advisory Groups

Module 4: School Meal Links.....356

School Meal links with the classroom, physical education, and community

Module 5: Measuring Success.....372

Identify methods by which to measure and celebrate success

Module 6: M-and-M's for School Meals.....379

A key to initiating and sustaining changes

Chapter 6 *School Meals*

Module 1: Creating School Meal Awareness

Step Up and Step Out to create awareness

Children who eat breakfast at school have increased standardized achievement test scores, improved attendance and reduced tardiness. (1) Students who eat breakfast have improved academic, behavioral, and emotional functioning. (2)

Students who eat lunch that meets National School Lunch Program (NSLP) requirements eat more vegetables, drink more milk and fewer sweetened beverages, eat more grain mixtures, and fewer cookies, cakes and salty snacks than students who make other lunchtime choices. (3)

The reality

Fewer than 60% of students choose the NSLP lunch. (3) Food options beyond the school lunch and breakfast are available to students in many schools. Foods sold a la carte, in school stores, in snack bars or in vending machines do not currently have to meet any standards for nutritional quality. (4)

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention 1994 School Health Policies and Programs Study showed (5)

- ♥ 77.7% of all middle/junior and senior high schools have vending machines that students can use
- ♥ Foods sold as school fund raisers compete with school meals in 25.3% of all middle/junior high schools, and 41.6% of all senior high schools
- ♥ More than one-third of all middle/junior high and senior high schools approached or were approached by a fast food restaurant wanting to offer foods for school meals.

USDA's 1998 School Food Purchase Study presented data that indicated (5)

- ♥ There was a sharp decline in volume of fluid milk (-29%), and strong growth in fruit juices (+31%), fruit drinks (+181%), carbonated beverages (+1,103%) in purchases from School Year 1984/1985 to School Year 1997/1998.

- ♥ A la carte foods at lunch are offered in less than half of all public elementary schools but in three of every four public middle/secondary schools. Milk, fruit drinks, ice cream, and cookies are most frequently cited as leading a la carte sellers in elementary schools. In middle/secondary schools, fruit drinks, pizza, snack chips, ice cream, cookies, and french fries are top a la carte sales items.

Reversing the trend

How can the trend be reversed?

1. It begins with creating an awareness of the issues. What are the factors that create unhealthy choices? What are the issues creating unhealthy choices?

They may look different in each community, but the National Food Service Management Institute (1998) examined factors associated with student participation in the National School Lunch Program in 12 high schools, and found: (5)

- ♥ The students perceived the lunch lines to be too long, the dining room to be crowded, and the time available to eat, once seated, to be inadequate
- ♥ Students with low participation ate off-campus much more frequently than student with high-student participation schools

Step Up and Step Out helps you to look at issues specific to your community.

2. It continues with an awareness of solutions...solutions suggested in this manual and in other resources, including *The Prescription for Change: Ten Keys to Promote Healthy Eating in Schools* (5) identified by five leading medical associations and the United States Department of Agriculture have been developed to assist each school community in writing its own prescription for change.
3. It reverses when solutions are initiated.

Exploring the issues



The school cafeteria is a wonderful learning laboratory for healthy eating choices! It is *very* much worth the effort to optimize opportunities for learning and practicing skills by planning school meal actions that make a difference!

Take a look at perceptions

In an interview survey conducted at one school, students, faculty, and administrators were asked the question, "When I say, 'school lunch', what comes to mind?"

Here are a few of the answers given:

- ♥ "Homemade bread"
- ♥ "Not enough to eat"
- ♥ "Too much starch"
- ♥ "Yucky!"
- ♥ "Yummy!"
- ♥ "Hurry and eat"
- ♥ "Chili and cinnamon rolls"
- ♥ "Where are the butter pats?"
- ♥ "Convenience, prepared foods"
- ♥ "Need to make budget cuts, save some money"



With the wide variety of responses, the food service director was left wondering where to go next!

The survey demonstrates the need for better teamwork with students, parents, faculty, administration, and community to identify school meal issues and build support.

When it comes to food, who's right?

Ask a group of people their definition of "good food", what they like to eat, or the best way to prepare a food item, and you will get wide and varied answers. As the above mentioned survey indicates, there are also variable ideas about what school food service is...does...and should be...from those the program serves.

What can the coalition do to address concerns surrounding school meals, and create an awareness of the vital role this program plays in the overall goal of increasing opportunities for healthy eating choices and physical activity?



Address "Food for Thought" concerns



Food for Thought: The potential for increasing revenue, not nutrition, sometimes determines decisions made regarding school meal practices, such as whether or not a la carte items are offered, and how or when vending machines are used.

Coalition Action: The coalition can work with administrators and school food service staff to develop options that create a balance between revenue generating factors and healthy eating choices.



Food for Thought: School meal programs, in general, seem to receive much criticism and complaints from students, parents, teachers, and the community at large.

Coalition Action: The coalition can develop a communication system whereby concerns can be discussed, and actions taken to address the issues. Actions may include, but are not limited to, listening sessions, student youth advisory groups, liaisons with faculty committees, parent/teacher groups, surveys, and cafeteria observation.



Food for Thought: To some degree, we all purchase, cook, and eat foods. Therefore, in a very general term, we all are "food experts." As a result, ideas surrounding food can become very emotional and personal because they are a matter of individual choice.

Coalition Action: Take the emotion out of the discussion by reminding everyone of personal differences and to apply the things that work for them. The coalition can keep programs, presentations, and efforts based on fact, education, and how to increase healthy eating choices.



Food for Thought: There is a misconception that as you improve the nutritional value of the school meal, the cost will increase.

Coalition Action: The coalition can help promote healthy changes, and market the benefits of offering healthy school meals. This allows the food service director time to implement sound budgeting and food service management practices.



Food for Thought: Decision-makers, such as administrators and school board members, as well as teachers, and parents, often have little or no school food service background. Therefore they are limited in their understanding of the functioning of this vital initiative component. (6)



Coalition Action: Quantity food service requires a completely different set of skills than cooking for a family. Your coalition can showcase the skills (menu planning, purchasing, preparation, equipment usage/maintenance, and time management) the school food service staff demonstrates daily through a variety of promotional activities. Educating others about the expertise and skills involved in school meals can go a long way in developing support. Try a “Walk Through the Food Service” activity. See Module 4: School Food Service Links for a description of this activity.



Food for Thought: At times it seems food vendors do not have many healthy food choices to offer, and that there is more interest in selling high-profit items to schools.

Coalition Action: School food service staff and coalition members can work with vendors to educate them regarding the mission and goals of the initiative and develop a win-win partnership. Vendors want the business and can become important and recognized partners in creating outstanding school food service operations.



Food for Thought: People sometimes have concerns, or develop stereotypes or bias, when there is talk of healthy change. Some food industry associations might become unnecessarily concerned that some products will be limited or excluded from the school menu.

Coalition Action: First, remember all foods can fit in a healthy diet so it isn't necessary to exclude certain types of foods. Changes may still need to be made and acceptance of change can occur slowly. Take small steps with small changes in a school menu and market the results...good taste, healthy choice, and enjoyment of eating! Develop partnerships with food producers and obtain input about how to best incorporate products as healthy eating choices in school meal plans.



Food for Thought: Teachers have tremendous influence on students' perception and participation in school meal programs. They can be powerful advocates or opponents.

Coalition Action: The coalition can support the link between the school meal program and classroom messages of healthy eating.



Food for Thought: There is a public perception that healthy eating habits are an “all or nothing” proposition. Some people may not understand the concepts of moderation, variety, proportion, and balance.

Coalition Action: The coalition can work to support the concept of “all foods can fit”, and recognize the key is to create increased opportunities for healthy eating choices.



Food for Thought: There is an age-old belief that as food gets healthier, it doesn't have as much taste appeal; and that everything that tastes good must be bad for you!

Coalition Action: Changes implemented in school menus will demonstrate to students, parents and the community that healthy food tastes great!



Food for Thought: At some schools, there is a concern that school food service staff are not adequately skilled and trained to meet the needs of the job tasks.

Coalition Action: In some instances, this is correct. It is important for the coalition to collaborate with administration to show support for education and training of food service staff, and for staff to be recognized for their initiative and achievement after receiving training.

Building the team concept

Here are some things for the coalition to remember when working with various partners to create awareness of school meals and build the team concept.



**Working with
administration
and school board**

Remember:

- ♥ This group may not recognize that healthy changes in the school meal program does not necessarily mean more money and staff are needed.
- ♥ Complaints are often offered without all the facts and accurate information. Offer the “rest of the story”.
- ♥ Food service staff need recognition and support for their efforts.
- ♥ School meals play an important role in the overall image of the school itself.
- ♥ School meals can be a powerful marketing tool for the school.



**Working with
school food service
staff**

Remember:

- ♥ The food service staff want the students to like the food.
- ♥ Food service staff may fear students won't like foods if the recipes are altered to make them healthier.
- ♥ Staff members take pride in their work.
- ♥ Staff may fear changes will create more work without more time.
- ♥ There is a close relationship between understanding and personally identifying with the healthy lifestyle goals and objectives of the initiative and supporting the initiative for the community.

Remember:

- ♥ Students may be skeptical that foods offered in school meals can taste good *and* be nutritious.
- ♥ The idea that all foods can fit in a balanced eating pattern may also be new to students.
- ♥ Students feel valued and a sense of ownership when their opinions and ideas are sought and used.
- ♥ Students can be involved in the development of partnerships between the classroom, athletic programs, and school meals.



**Working with
Students**



**Working
with
Parents**

Remember:

- ♥ School meals are opportunities for students to receive a quality meal of economic and nutritional value. Market this to parents!
- ♥ School lunch is intended to supply 1/3rd of the student's daily caloric and nutritional needs, but parents often don't understand this factor.
- ♥ School meal participation offers an opportunity to encourage family discussion about nutrition and healthy choice issues.
- ♥ The school meal participation offers an opportunity to encourage family discussion about nutrition and healthy choice issues.
- ♥ The school meal program models healthy food choices that can be repeated in the home.



**Working with
the community
at large**

Remember:

- ♥ The community-at-large offers great opportunities for partnering with school meals, but they often go unrecognized. Take steps to recognize community members.
- ♥ People outside the school often do not know how school meals function, and their only information is what they “hear” downtown.
- ♥ Most community partners have ties to the school. Look for ways that these links can be used to create a connection with school meals.

**Step Up and Step Out By using Dietary Guidelines
for Americans to create awareness of healthy eating**

Dietary Guidelines offer simple advice for healthy eating and physical activity.

Dietary Guidelines for Americans 2000, 5th Edition (7)

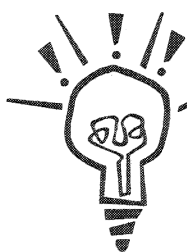
- ♥ Aim for a healthy weight
- ♥ Be physically active each day
- ♥ Let the Pyramid guide your food choices
- ♥ Choose a variety of grains daily, especially whole grains
- ♥ Choose a variety of fruits and vegetables daily
- ♥ Keep food safe to eat
- ♥ Choose a diet that is low in saturated fat and cholesterol and moderate in total fat
- ♥ Choose beverages and foods to moderate your intake of sugars
- ♥ Choose and prepare foods with less salt
- ♥ If you drink alcoholic beverages, do so in moderation



References and Resources

- (1) Meyers AF, Sampson AE, Weitzman M, Rogers BL, Kayne H. “School Breakfast Program and School Performance,” *Am J Dis Child.* 1989; 143: 1234-1239 as cited in *Healthy School Nutrition Environments: Promoting Healthy Eating Behaviors*, 2000

- (2) Murphy JM, Pagano ME, Nachmani J, Sperling P, Kane S, Kleinman RE. "The Relationship of School Breakfast to Psychosocial and Academic Functioning," *Arch of Pediatr and Adoles Med.* 1998; 152: 899-906. as cited in *Healthy School Nutrition Environments: Promoting Healthy Eating Behaviors*, 2000
- (3) Burghardt J, Devaney B. eds. "The School Nutrition Dietary Assessment Study," *Am J Clin Nut.* 1995; 61 (suppl): 213S-220S, 232S-240S. as cited in *Healthy School Nutrition Environments: Promoting Healthy Eating Behaviors*, 2000
- (4) United States Department of Agriculture. *Healthy School Nutrition Environments: Promoting Healthy Eating Behaviors*, 2000. Online at www.fns.usda.gov/cnd/HealthyEating/HealthyEatingBehavior/healthy_eatingchallenge.htm. Accessed June 20, 2000.
- (5) United States Department of Agriculture. *Healthy Eating Environments*, 2000. Online at www.fns.usda.gov/cnd/HealthyEating/school_environment.htm. Accessed June 20, 2000.
- (7) Information for persons working with U.S.D.A.'s child nutrition programs is available through U.S.D.A.'s Healthy School Meals Resource System (HSMRS Database). <http://schoolmeals.nal.usda:8001/database/index.html>
- (6) The Dietary Guidelines for Americans 2000, 5th Edition, U.S. Department of Agriculture Center for Nutrition Policy and Promotion, www.usda.gov/cnpp. To purchase a single or bulk copies of the 5th edition, contact the Government Printing Office 202-512-1800.



Module Tip:

School meals is often the "unknown" partner in developing a quality school health initiative. Creating an awareness of the vital role of the school meal program and expertise of the school food service staff is key to ensuring a successful, sustained effort by the coalition.

FAQs:

- ❑ **Question:** Won't the price of a school lunch have to be increased with these new healthy changes being added in the menu?
- ❑ **Answer:** Balancing the budget with menu planning can be a challenge, but one that can be accomplished with a collaborative effort from administration, food vendors, and food service staff.
- ❑ **Question:** Won't the kid's favorite foods have to be eliminated from the menu to meet the guidelines of the initiative?
Answer: With skilled menu planning, and the use of a variety of foods in the meal plan, even high fat favorites can still find their place on the menu. Remember, all foods can fit!!

Module Glossary:

A la Carte: School meal choices that are not a part of a USDA reimbursable meal plan.



Brainstorming School Meal Awareness

1. List awareness creating activities your community can use for school meals. Remember to plan something for each community group (children, teens, parents, senior citizens, business, etc.).
2. Include these activities in an action plan.

Children: *Example: Food Pyramid posters in classrooms with “impromptu” discussions of how that day’s school meal “fits.”*

Teens: *Example: Healthy eating bulletin board and nutrient analysis of menu items in cafeteria.*

Parents: *Example: A school meal “happenings” column in the school’s parent newsletter.*

Senior Citizens: *Example: “Lunch and Learn” programs at the Senior Service’s Center.*

Example



Environmental Change Plan

Objective: By 2005, there will be at least 4 actions that promote school meals.

Environmental change methods planned. Check all that apply.	Actions and resources needed to implement the plan	Problems to resolve	Who takes action, and by what date?	Review— results of actions Check all that apply.
<input type="checkbox"/> Policy <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Collaboration <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Repetition <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Education <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Support <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Reward	<p>Action: <i>Plan "Cat in the Hat Day" cafeteria event</i></p> <p>Marketing Plan: <i>Have students plan and implement a marketing campaign</i></p> <p>Resources: <i>Menu, classroom to materials for cafeteria event</i></p>		<p><i>Food service director heads committee to initiate plans by 1/6/05</i></p>	<p>Communication:</p> <input type="checkbox"/> Great marketing <input type="checkbox"/> Need M-and-M's <p>Time:</p> <input type="checkbox"/> Good timing <input type="checkbox"/> Needs work <p>Location:</p> <input type="checkbox"/> Good <input type="checkbox"/> Needs work <p>Resources:</p> <input type="checkbox"/> Feasible cost <input type="checkbox"/> Good <input type="checkbox"/> Needs work <p>Participation:</p> <input type="checkbox"/> Good <input type="checkbox"/> Needs work <p>Overall:</p> <input type="checkbox"/> Great-continue <input type="checkbox"/> Good-revise <input type="checkbox"/> Fair-revise
-OT- Problems resolved: <input type="checkbox"/> Communication <input type="checkbox"/> Time <input type="checkbox"/> Location <input type="checkbox"/> Lack of equipment <input type="checkbox"/> Other	<p>Action: <i>Plan student designed marketing campaign</i></p> <p>Marketing Plan: <i>To be determined by students</i></p> <p>Resources: <i>Determined by events planned</i></p> <p>Action: <i>Art classes to design decorations for event</i></p> <p>Marketing Plan: <i>To be determined by students</i></p> <p>Resources: <i>Paper and other art supplies</i></p>		<p><i>4th grade art teachers coordinate art design by 1/15/05</i></p>	

Comments: An example of one of the planned cafeteria events, "Cat in the Hat Day," follows.

Example



Action!

Event Planning Tool

Title Of Program/Project/Event: “Cat in the Hat Day”...What’s in a Food’s Color?

☐ Media ☒ School ☐ Business ☐ Community

Target Audience: (check all planned for your activity)

☒ Students 580 ☐ Parents 55 ☒ Teachers 30 ☐ School meal director and staff _____

☒ School administrators _____ ☐ Business/community leaders/community-at-large _____

Outline/Description/Objectives/Ideas:

1. Read “Cat in the Hat” in the classroom. Discuss the color of foods and how it affects our food choices. Discuss unusual food colors as well as lack of color in meals. Compare all white meals like pears, mashed potatoes, turkey, and white milk to a meal with contrasting colors. Create menus from food models or magazine pictures, trying different color combinations.
2. Taste foods in the classroom that come in “white” and another color, i.e., white vs. sweet potato, white vs. purple grape juice, white vs. pink grapefruit. Compare their nutrients.
3. Have someone dress up as the “Cat in the Hat” for a cafeteria appearance.
4. Food service serves white and sweet potatoes (or a choice of purple or white grape juice).
5. Play “hot potato” in physical education class.

Marketing Plan: Posters advertising the event. Announcement on monthly menu.

Resource Materials/Supplies/Food/Handouts:

Recipes/menu

Foods to taste

Food models or magazine pictures

Beanbags or similar equipment for “hot potato”

Instructions for classroom and physical education activities

Costs/Funding Source:

Minimal depending on activities selected

Manpower Needed:

School food service staff for lunch

Classroom/PE teachers

Space/Time/Date Requirements:

Cafeteria/classroom space

Prep Time:

1-2 hours

Alternate Plan:

Have a picture of “Cat in the Hat” in the cafeteria instead of having someone dress up. Use the idea in conjunction with promoting reading.

Comments:

Menu – “Cat in the Hat” Specials: Green Eggs (spinach) and Ham, Red/White Striped Hats, Cat’s Rhyming Fruits, Rainy Day Biscuits, Hat’s Off to You, Cat’s Drink.